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# LETTER

FROM THE

SECRETARY OF THE COMMONWEALTH

OF

*Pennsylvania,*

*BY DIRECTION OF THE GOVERNOR,*

RELATIVE TO THE LATE MALIGNANT FEVER; AND  
REPORT OF THE BOARD OF MANAGERS, OF THE  
MARINE AND CITY HOSPITALS,  
IN REPLY.

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*PHILADELPHIA:*

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1798.

# LETTER

TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE

ASSOCIATION

OF THE

PROFESSORS OF THE

ARTS AND SCIENCES

OF THE

UNIVERSITY OF

CHICAGO

IN

THE

MONTH OF

SEPTEMBER

1888

BY

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## Secretary's Letter.

GENTLEMEN,

THE Governor is desirous of submitting to the Legislature, a comprehensive view of the mortality and expenditure, produced by the calamity, which has recently afflicted the City and its Suburbs. He, therefore, directs me to request, that you will favour him with a Report, and the necessary documents, upon the subject. The information contemplated may be properly embraced, perhaps, by the following enquiries.

1st. At what time, in what place, and in what manner, was the malignant Fever introduced into the City and Suburbs?

2d. How long did the Fever continue to rage, and what is the number of its victims?

3d. What was the general police pursued by the Board, the overseers of the Poor, and their Agents, to subdue, or mitigate the disease, to aid the sick, to inter the dead, and to maintain the Poor?

4th. What sum has been raised on this occasion, by taxes, by voluntary loan, and by gratuitous contributions; what sum has been expended, and what balance remains on hand?

5th. What is the number and condition of the Citizens who have been relieved, and will any extraordinary aid be necessary, on the part of the Legislature, for the support of the Poor during the ensuing Winter:

6th. What precautions ought to be taken to prevent the recurrence of so dreadful a calamity.



Permit me to add, that it is the Governor's wish that the Overseers of the Poor, and, particularly, those active Citizens, who superintended the business of the Camps, should be consulted in forming your Report. As the Legislature meets on the 4th of December, I hope it will be convenient for you, to comply with the Governor's request, in the course of the present month.

I have the honor to be,  
with sentiments of sincere  
respect, and esteem,  
Gentlemen,

Your most obedient humble servant,

A. J. DALLAS.

Secretary.

Secretary's Office, Philadelphia, }  
8th November, 1798.

To the President and Managers of the  
Marine and City Hospitals.



## Reply.

*Health-Office, 1st. December, 1793.*

SIR,

THE Secretary of the Commonwealth, in a communication of the 8th. ult. by your direction, having propounded certain queries relative to the late dreadful calamity; a sense of duty, common interest, and a poignant retrospect of the past scenes of misery and wretchedness, which came more immediately under our care, have excited an intense solicitude and assiduity, on our part, to answer satisfactorily your inquiries, and devise means for the prevention of so terrible a scourge in future.

We regret that the continuance of the disease to so late a period has delayed the adjustment of the accounts of the institutions under our direction, and will consequently deprive us of that accuracy which is desirable. We believe, however, that the report will not ultimately be found materially incorrect.

A few preliminary remarks, relative to the precautions which have been taken in order to prevent the importation of disease, may not be superfluous.

The law, in respect to quarantine, has been construed and executed in the strictest sense. Every power and effort which the Board, or the officers under their direction, were capable of exercising, has been employed to cut off all communication with the vessels under quarantine.—Every possible mode of purification, which a law so manifestly defective would permit, has been adopted, and the most rigid scrutiny had, before the vessels were permitted to proceed to the city.

At the Marine Hospital, the fences were extended into the river, the more completely to enclose the premises, and all intercourse therewith precluded.

For the sake of perspicuity we shall conform, as near as possible, to the order in which you have presented the several subjects of enquiry ; and

1st. The malignant fever, according to our information, first made its appearance in Water street, between Spruce and Walnut streets, about the first of August. Several respectable physicians declare that it appeared in the month of June; and, that many unequivocal cases occurred early in July.

Unshackled by prejudice and diffident of opinion, we have endeavoured to trace the disease to its origin, but without success. Those objects which have been pointed to with the greatest confidence as the foreign source of the disease, on investigation, afford no such proof.

Thus situated, it would be indecorous, in an official report to the Chief Magistrate, to substitute opinion for fact. We deem a question, on which the lives of thousands and the prosperity or annihilation of our flourishing city may depend, of too much importance to rest upon the *exclusive speculation* of either foreign or domestic origin.

In our answer to your 6th query, we shall endeavour to designate such general measures as, when properly digested by legislative wisdom, are, in our judgment, best calculated to guard against the recurrence of so fatal a malady from either domestic or foreign sources.

2d. The disease continued to rage until about the first of November ; and, partially, until about the 5th. The whole number of victims, exclusive of those who died in the country, are three thousand six hundred and forty-five.

3d. The City Hospital was opened on the 7th August.—all vessels were immediately removed by order of the Board from all the wharves included between Mr. Levi Hollingsworth's and Tun Alley.—The Board publicly admonished the inhabitants of the infected neighbourhood to remove without delay.—A quantity of damaged coffee and cocoa, imported on the 30th July, and stored in Ross's stores, was reported on the 3d August to the Board to be in a putrid state. It was immediately put on board the vessel in which it was imported, and sent down to the Marine Hospital for purification.

Two skilful physicians and two assistants were appointed to reside at the City Hospital, with a competent number of nurses and attendants, and every thing necessary for the comfort and relief of the patients was provided. All the powers of reasoning, persuasion, and authority, which the Board possessed, short of absolute coercion, were assiduously employed to induce the sick to remove instantly to the Hospital; for which purpose carriages constantly attended, and litters were constructed as speedily as possible, to convey them with ease and convenience.

All the regular practising physicians of the City and Liberties were authorized to grant orders for admission into the City Hospital.—Hearses and persons were employed for the speedy removal and interment of the dead, and the Health-Office kept open day and night, for the purpose of receiving applications and executing the duties of the office with promptitude.

In order to ascertain the progress of the disease and form some criterion by which to judge of its extension or decline, as well as to mark those parts of the city and liberties in which it raged with the greatest violence, a suitable person was appointed to obtain from the physicians the daily reports of new cases which occurred in their practice severally, together with the names and residence of the patients.

Skilful physicians were appointed to attend the poor of the City and Liberties, and medicines provided for their use at the expence of the institution.

The buildings at the City Hospital being found insufficient, a house contiguous thereto was rented; the summer houses were covered with canvas, a number of sheds, and a new frame building 60 by 20 feet, two stories high, were erected for the better accommodation of the sick.

The alarming progress of the disease, and frightful increase of mortality; the apparent temerity or apathy of some, and the indigence and distress of others, impelled the Board to reiterate in terms the most impressive, their admonitions to the inhabitants who were in circumstances to abandon their homes; and, in conjunction with the Guardians of the poor, to provide a retreat for the indigent.

Tents were accordingly erected on the east bank of Schuylkill, to which they were invited to resort, and ample provision was there made for their comfort and support. These measures being inadequate to the urgency of the occasion, temporary buildings for the accommodation of near two thousand persons were erected on Masters' Ground, two miles above the city.

The regulation and superintendence of each encampment was confided to a committee of respectable and humane citizens, who voluntarily undertook the arduous task.

By the joint authority of the Board of Managers and the Board of Guardians of the Poor, a committee of respectable citizens were appointed for the distribution of relief to the poor of the City and Liberties; whose situation rendered it improper to remove to the tents.

The infected houses and bedding were cleaned and purified by order of the Board so far as was found practicable. This, however, was but partial, owing to the inevitable difficulties and confusion occasioned by the calamity.

4th. The amount raised by taxes and by loan in anticipation of the taxes to be levied the present year for the support of the Marine and City Hospitals, viz :

Borrowed on account of the taxes  
for the year 1797, D. 7268 09

A tax of 10,000 Dollars has been  
levied for the present year; the sum  
collected on account thereof is, 676 87

Received of the Bank of Pennsylv-  
ania, on the credit of the taxes of the  
present year, 20,000 00  
————— 27,944 96

### *Private Loan.*

Borrowed of the several Banks, on security of  
certain individuals, for the relief of the poor, un-  
der the joint direction of the Board of Managers  
and the Board of Guardians of the Poor, which sum  
was borrowed on the faith of Legislative reim-  
bursement, 29,000 00  
—————

Total raised by taxes and loans, Dols. 56,944 96  
—————

### GRATUITOUS CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED FOR THE USE OF THE POOR.

*By the Board of Managers of the Marine and  
City Hospitals.*

In Cash, D. 14040 05  
In produce and cloathing valued at 2000  
————— 16,040 05



*By the Committee of the Tents on the Banks of  
Schuylkill.*

In Cash,	D. 3537 29
In produce and cloathing valued at	5000
	<hr/> 8537 29

*By the Committee of the Encampment at  
Masters' place.*

In cash,	Dols. 3,254 27
In produce and cloathing, valued at	6,568 22
	<hr/> 9,822 49

*By the Committee for the relief of the Poor in  
the City and Liberties.*

In cash,	Dols. 420 00
In produce and cloathing valued at	1,178 68
	<hr/> 1,598 68

Total,	Dols. 35,998 51
	<hr/>

SUMS EXPENDED BY THE SEVERAL INSTITUTIONS.

*By the Board of Managers of the Marine and  
City Hospitals.*

In cash for the relief of the sick poor,	D. 9,782 56
In produce and cloathing, valued at	2,000 00
Paid the distributing committee	4,257 49
Paid on account Marine and City Hospitals,	20,975 20
	<hr/> 37,015 25

*By the Committee of the Tents, on the Banks of  
Schuylkill.*

In cash, of which 10,000 dollars was  
a part of the 29,000 dollars loan, D. 13,537 29  
In produce and cloathing valued at 5,000  

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18,537 29

*By the Committee of the Encampment at  
Masters' Place.*

In cash, of which 9000 dollars was  
a part of the 29,000 dollars loan, D. 12,254 27  
In produce and cloathing valued at 6,568 22  

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18,822 49

*By the Committee for the relief of the poor  
in the City and Liberties.*

In cash, of which 10,000 dol-  
lars was a part of the 29,000 dollar loan, D. 14,677 49

Deduct so much charged  
in the expenditures of the  
Board of Managers, of the  
Marine and City Hospitals,  
paid to this committee for  
distribution,

4,257 49

In produce and cloathing  
valued at

10,420

1,178 68

11,598 68

Total, Dollars,

85,973 71



*Recapitulation of the preceding statement.*

Total amount of taxes and loans	56,944 96
Total amount of gratuitous contributions	35,998 51
	<hr/> 92,943 47
Total amount expended by the several institutions,	85,973 71

Balance in the hands of the Treasurer of the  
Marine and City Hospitals Dollars 6,969 76

Note, the above balance is on account of the Marine and City Hospitals. This sum, however, will be inadequate to the discharge of the debts now due by the said institutions.

*Number of Persons relieved, viz.*

At the City Hospital,	879
By the Physicians appointed by the Board of Managers of the Marine and City Hospitals to attend the poor of the City and Liberties about,	3000
At the tents on Schuylkill and the vicinity thereof,	1950
At the encampment on Masters' Place and its vicinity,	2024
By the Committee for distributing relief in the City and Liberties about,	3500
	<hr/> Total 11,353

Exclusive of the above expenditures and number of persons relieved, the guardians of the poor have incurred a very great and extraordinary expence for the relief of orphans and persons distressed by the calamity.

5th. The poor will, doubtless, require extraordinary aid from the legislature the ensuing winter, in consequence of the suspension of labour during the prevalence of the disease, the extraordinary expenses incurred by sickness, or removal from the city, and, in all probability, a short interval from the return of the citizens to the closing of the navigation for the exercise of industry.

6th. No question can be more interesting, none more entitled to serious consideration, than that which shall determine the precautions to be adopted, in order to prevent the recurrence of a calamity so destructive. Accordingly, we find our fellow citizens generally engaged in the contemplation and discussion of the subject.

Whatever difference of opinion may exist as to its origin, ALL appear to agree in the general system of police necessary to guard against its introduction in future.

The idea of resorting to the legislature of the union, for an act to interdict the commerce from the Mediterranean and West-Indies, during the Summer months, appears to be general, and if attainable, would certainly be most desirable, at least until some effectual system shall be devised and completely ready for execution.

The great diversity of sentiment which appears to prevail in the different states, relative to the origin of the disease, together with the powerful influence of commercial interest and rivalry, may create insurmountable obstacles to the attainment of an efficient law from the general government.

Under these circumstances, we think it will be prudent to persevere with energy in an application to the state legislature, for effectual quarantine and Health laws, with liberal endowments for the support of the several institutions. It may here be proper to observe that a well digested quarantine law of this state

will be necessary (even in the event of a law of the general government) to provide for the ease of vessels which may enter our port from stress of weather, or other casualty during the period of interdiction.

We take the liberty of suggesting the propriety of an application to the governments of the states of Delaware and New-Jersey for their co-operation. The principles of common interest and self-preservation, and their participation in the late calamity, must dictate to them the necessity of such a coalition.

A quarantine law to be effectual should make provision for the following objects.

An insular situation, remote from the City, should be selected, if practicable, for the place of quarantine; if none such can be obtained, forty or fifty acres on some convenient part of the Delaware shore should be secured by a high and strong enclosure—Wharves, ware houses, and other suitable buildings should be erected for the reception and purification of cargoes and accommodation of persons.

All vessels from the Mediterranean and West Indies, from the first of June to the first October, should there discharge their cargoes, which, together with the vessels, should be thoroughly purified, and perform a quarantine of at least 20 days. Guards should be constantly posted at all the avenues, and guard boats stationed around the fleet.

The law should provide for the prohibition of intercourse, by land or water with such of our sister states as may not adopt efficient quarantine laws; and interdict all communication with infected places.

Having designated those general regulations, which we conceive are best adapted to guard against the importation of disease,

we shall take the liberty of adverting to measures, which appear to us no less necessary to the health and prosperity of our city.

If the domestic origin of the disease is denied, yet it must be allowed that local causes have a potent effect in its diffusion, and encreasing its malignity; of this, fatal experience has furnished an irrefragable proof in the excessive mortality, and number of the diseased, in particular parts of the City and Liberties.

We believe that these dreadful consequences would be greatly mitigated, if not wholly averted, by a judicious reformation in the police of the city and liberties.

The introduction of wholesome running water for domestic purposes, and for washing the streets, and common sewers, is in our judgment, an object of primary importance; the cleansing of all the docks to a depth below the level of low water mark, a strict attention to the removal of all filth and putrifying substances, and correcting the noxious effluvia from the privies in the commencement of the hot season, would, we conceive, be productive of the happiest effects.

The great attention which has been paid to the cleansing of the best improved parts of our city, and the obvious neglect of remote and confined situations, has long been a subject of serious complaint.

Any work, however great, will be but partial whilst the stagnant pools, and filth of the narrow lanes, alleys and yards, in the extremities of the city, and particularly in the districts of Southwark and the Northern Liberties, are suffered to exist.

We beg leave to call your attention to a subject which we consider as deeply interesting.

The establishment of a City Hospital upon an enlarged plan, permanently provided with every thing necessary for the comfort and relief of the sick, and skillful professors, nurses, &c. provisionally engaged in the event of a recurrence of the disease, would excite public confidence, and greatly diminish the evils of the calamity. The situation of the present City Hospital, we consider as highly improper for the purpose, from its contiguity to the marshes of the Schuylkill. The lots and improvements thereon, if sold, would, probably produce a sum equivalent to the purchase of an elevated situation, and the completion of buildings better adapted to the purpose.

We have been led into unavoidable prolixity from the magnitude of the subject, and a wish to contribute the result of our experience and observations. Should they produce, in any degree, the desired effect, it will alleviate the recollection of those painful scenes which it was our lot to witness, and our duty to relieve.

By order of the Board of Managers of the Marine  
and City Hospitals,

WILLIAM JONES, President.

Attest,

TIMOTHY PAXSON, Clerk,

*Thomas Mifflin Esq. Governor of the }  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. }*





